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# FSQS FACTS

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## FOOD SAFETY IN SERVING THE PUBLIC

The last thing food-service operators want is for people to get sick after eating one of their meals. Most operators do a good job, but just one outbreak of foodborne poisoning--and the public will forget their long record of excellence.

Foodborne bacteria poisoning can be caused by the mishandling of potentially hazardous foods, including meat and poultry products. Some unpleasant symptoms of poisoning are headache, diarrhea, vomiting, and stomach cramps that may last for several hours or even days. Some of the bacteria which cause food poisoning are Salmonella, Staphylococcus aureus ("staph"), Clostridium perfringens, and Clostridium botulinum.

Food poisoning can be prevented. The following are tips for safe handling of meat and poultry foods. However, other potentially hazardous foods--such as custards, potato salad, eggs, milk, and fish--require equally careful handling to protect the public health.

### BUY SAFE FOOD

First of all, food-service operators must be concerned with buying safe food. Inspect food products as to their sanitary condition before accepting them.

Do not buy or use meat or poultry products from containers with these faults: leaking, bulging, or damaged cans; cracked jars or jars with loose lids. Do not taste or use food with a foul odor or when liquid spurts from the container when you open it. These foods could contain the rare, but often fatal, botulism poison.

### KEEP IT HOT

Most germs that cause food poisoning are killed when meat and poultry foods are cooked. Poultry, poultry stuffings, stuffed meats, and stuffing containing meat should be completely cooked with no interruption in the cooking process. Once the food is cooked, keep it hot until serving. Since any temperature between 40° and 140° F. permits growth of food-poisoning bacteria, food should remain in this critical temperature zone for no more than 2 to 3 hours.

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Meat and poultry foods that have been cooked and then refrigerated should be reheated rapidly to at least 165° F. internal temperature before serving. Steamtables, double boilers, warmers, and similar hot-food holding facilities are not suitable for the reheating of potentially hazardous foods.

#### KEEP IT COLD

Raw or cooked meats and poultry must be stored below 40° F. Cooked foods should be used within 2 to 3 days, preferably within 24 hours. Don't refrigerate cooked meat and poultry a second time after they have been removed from refrigeration and reheated for serving. The extra handling may increase the opportunity for bacterial growth.

Large quantities of hot foods need to be partially cooled before they are refrigerated to avoid raising the temperature of the refrigerator. Cooling a roast or fowl may be speeded by placing it in front of a fan or by setting the food container in a large container or sink filled with cold water. Liquid foods, such as soups and stews, can be cooled by pouring them into shallow pans and stirring occasionally.

Foods that are served cold, including cold meats, need refrigeration until serving time. Never keep cooked meat and poultry products at room temperature for more than 2 hours, including preparation time.

Store food in the freezer at 0° F. or below. To thaw a frozen food product, place the wrapped product into the refrigerator and thaw completely. Thawing will take from several hours to a couple days (for a large turkey or roast). For quicker thawing, frozen products may be thawed in water-tight packages under cold water or in air-tight double brown paper bags at room temperature. Cook food promptly after thawing.

#### KEEP IT CLEAN

If you keep germs off meat and poultry products, you avoid problems. Keep utensils, kitchen equipment, and serving equipment soap-and-hot-water clean. Some areas may require sanitizing with special chemicals to guarantee protection for you and your customers; check with local health officials on requirements. All food-contact equipment should be easily cleanable--this means surfaces that are readily accessible and made of materials that may be properly sanitized. Such equipment includes slicers, mixers, meatblocks, tables, counters, refrigerators, and steamtables.

It is equally important to keep hands clean. Germs are a natural part of the environment--you have to keep washing them off. After handling raw meats, wash your hands before touching other foods or food surfaces. Suppose you carry raw hamburgers to the grill on a platter, then, without washing it, use the same platter for the cooked hamburgers. Result? Germs on your cooked hamburgers.

At all times--during storage, preparation, display, and service--food should be protected from dust, insects, rodents, unclean equipment, unnecessary handling, coughs and sneezes, and overhead drips or leaks.

Food on display should be protected from consumer contamination, too, by using packaging, serving-line protector devices, display cases, or other effective means.

#### TRAINING PERSONNEL

Most foodborne-poisoning outbreaks are caused by failure of food-service personnel to follow good food-handling practices. Also, each and every worker must follow accepted practices of sanitation and cleanliness. Persons with colds and infections, or sores and cuts on their hands, must not handle foods. They should be encouraged to take sick leave.

New employees must have proper orientation before starting on the job. Experienced employees should have continuing on-the-job reminders of the requirements for food safety.

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Reminder -- for safe food service:   Keep it hot.  
  Keep it cold.  
  Keep it clean.

